TRENDS

Broadband to The People

Wireless broadband is a laptop owner's dream come true—if you have the money to pay for it. Now, with an 802.11b (Wi-Fi) wireless communication card in hand, you may be able to grab a free, speedy Net connection from a park bench, coffee shop, or even your apartment. Some broadband users are creating neighborhood Wi-Fi access points, making wireless broadband available, for free, to anyone within signal range.

Finding a free wireless network can be tricky. The **Bay Area Wireless Users Group** ***(www.bawug.org)*** publishes a list of open networks in the San Francisco Bay area, as well as links to other lists nationwide. Another resource is **FreeNetworks.org** ***(www.freenetworks.org)***.

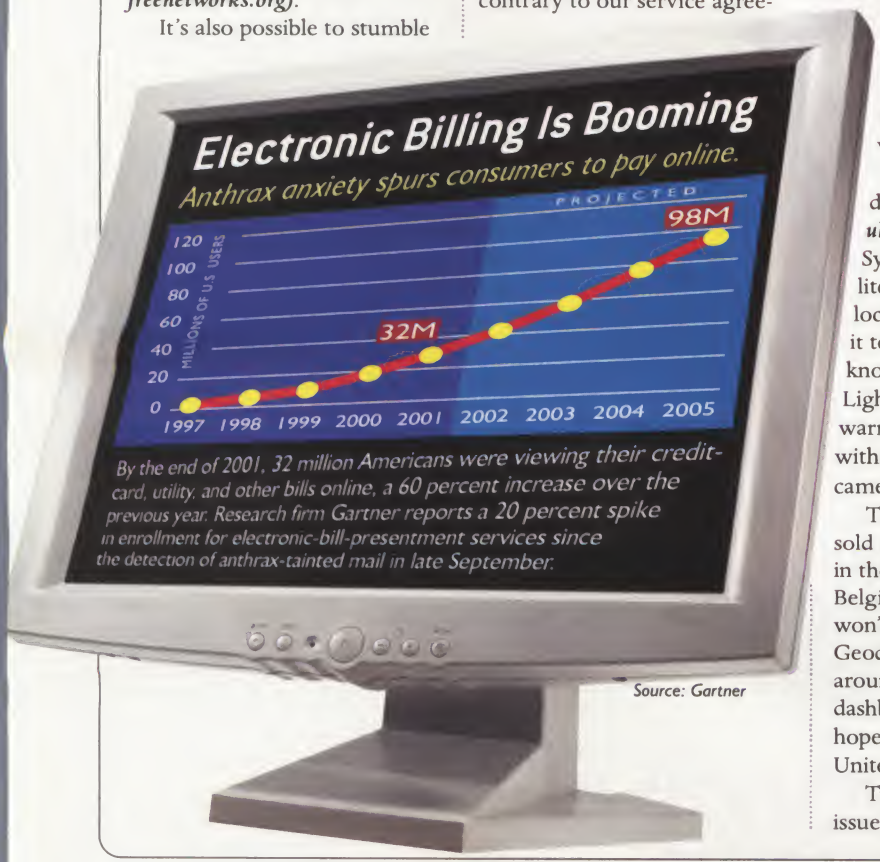
It's also possible to stumble upon a Wi-Fi network while walking or driving, though it can be hard to tell if it is open to the public. "Many of us are encouraging people to use '-open' as part of the network ID in open networks," says Cliff Skolnick, who maintains the Bay Area list.

Skolnick also encourages home broadband users to consider providing wireless access to their communities. "Why not share a resource that does not have any incremental cost?" he asks.

Sharing your home Internet connection may be generous, but it may not be legal. The terms of service for many residential broadband access providers prohibit distributing access to others. "So-called 'free-nets,' where someone sets up an unauthorized wireless way to hook up friends or family members without charge, is contrary to our service agreements," says Mike Luftman, vice president of corporate communications for **Time Warner Cable,** owner of broadband service provider **Road Runner**. "It is the same thing as cable theft and is against the law."

Skolnick agrees. "It's shortsighted for people to not follow the acceptable-use policy of their ISP," he says. "You can get a DSL ISP that does not have those restrictions, or business-class service with less restrictive policies."

Having your broadband provider threaten legal action isn't the only hazard. Sharing your connection is a potential security risk to your data, so you'd need to turn off file and printer sharing. ***—Kevin Savetz***


Electronic Billing Is Booming
Anthrax anxiety spurs consumers to pay online.
PROJECTED
98M
32M
MILLIONS OF U.S. USERS
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005
By the end of 2001, 32 million Americans were viewing their credit-card, utility, and other bills online, a 60 percent increase over the previous year. Research firm Gartner reports a 20 percent spike in enrollment for electronic-bill-presentment services since the detection of anthrax-tainted mail in late September.

Source: Gartner

GPS for Speed Demons

You might not be smiling if you're caught on candid camera—a traffic camera, that is. To help drivers avoid unwanted portraits, a British company has created a device that warns them when they're nearing "speed cameras," which snap photos of speeding vehicles.

Morpheous' Geodesy device ***(www.morpheous.co.uk)*** uses Global Positioning System (GPS) satellites to track a car's location and compare it to a database of known speed traps. Lights and a buzzer warn you when you're within a mile of a speed camera.

The company has sold about 10,000 units in the United Kingdom, Belgium, and Germany. You won't currently find the Geodesy, which costs £350, or around $500, on an American dashboard, but the company hopes to release it in the United States.

Traffic cameras are a bigger issue for European drivers than for those in the States, where such cameras are used almost exclusively to catch drivers who run red lights.

The Geodesy would alert drivers to the red-light cameras in the more than *60 U.S.* communities in which they are deployed, and it would be legal. Conventional radar detectors are legal in noncommercial vehicles (except in Washington, D.C., and Virginia). Because the Geodesy detects nothing but the car's position, current legislation would not outlaw its use.

Officer Jason Lee, a spokesman for the Los Angeles Police Department, believes the gadget would be of limited usefulness, however. "There are other ways to get caught," he says. "There are estimating speed, pacing, and other ways to catch speeders—for their safety and the safety of others." ***—K.S.***

The Geodesy puts the brakes on traffic tickets in Europe.

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